

# Art in America

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## Kenny Scharf at Tony Shafrazi

Unlike his cohorts of the early 1980s, Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, Kenny Scharf has yet to be given a major New York museum exhibition. A good case could be made for one. In this exhibition, as in his previous show at Shafrazi, Scharf paints like a master who challenges himself with fresh technical problems and solutions, lavish-



Kenny Scharf: *Blobeija*, 1999, oil, acrylic, enamel on canvas with wood and cast polymer frame, 57 1/2 by 40 inches; at Tony Shafrazi.

ing his fluent technique on familiar subject matter.

His paintings immerse viewers in a world of visual stimulation, where Tanguyesque spacescapes or lush jungles serve as a metaphor for the power of unbounded imagination. The small to midsize paintings graft midcentury biomorphism to 1980s prankster outrageousness. Scratch marks in the paint form decorative lattices or atom-orbit swirls. Another recurring motif is a gaseous, nearly transparent swell with delicate white edges. The works frequently feature sharp contours, shadows, depths and gradations of single-tone background colors (lavender to dark blue in *Las Venus*) or gradations between tones (from purple to tan in *Beyond*). Some of the images extend from the canvas onto the frames, as in *Brownscape*. In other cases, the frames more conventionally emphasize containment: one such is *Beyond*, with its faux-wood frame painted gold and graced with grimacing protector-figures.

*Flungle* is classic Scharf—a clash between blood-red and candy-purple otherworldly vegetation. Sharply delineated red branches end in brushy impasto smears of white and aqua in which little black bugs

abound. Scharf's new "drip-faces" display his highest level of abstraction. *Drip-Dry* has a great allover effect. Its washy, runny background blobs set off dense black drips, which are decidedly not like Pollock's. The curls that keep doubling back on one another at bottom right of this painting are more self-conscious and contained. Within the areas thus created, Scharf sets signature funny faces, some bearing goofy smiles, others doleful looks of horror or stone-faced stares. Woven into this mesh are bright red fantastic figures made convincingly three-dimensional with illusionistic highlight and shadow.

Scharf has long been known for his work with found materials, such as customized television sets and walk-in environments called "Closets." By contrast, his new sculptures are fabricated adaptations of his painting imagery, conspicuous for their highly professional luster. The finishes vary in tonality and color effects, from the bluish *Turnstar 2001* to the orangish *Bloopzipbloopzipbloop*.

*Zipzamball* features a reflective bronze ball that allows viewers to see themselves and the gallery in a slightly wavy convex-mirror view. The mock-Brancusi *Bird in Space*, a slim, tapering 37-inch-tall bronze with a '60s cartoon face, slyly parodies the earlier sculpture's sensuous grace. Here, as elsewhere, Scharf's humor prevents artist and audience from taking themselves too seriously. —Vincent Katz

## Craig Fisher at Florence Lynch

Craig Fisher continued, in this exhibition, to work in series, to investigate chance configurations and to make paintings that, in theory at least, make themselves. They are open-ended abstractions in which he acts more as agent than as author. It's a kind of visual shake, rattle and roll where what comes up is what you get—plus a few interventions, like cropping the finished product.